

their calling as a minor art, but still an art—
something
which will add pleasure, not peevishness, to
life; which
will look for new beauties rather than new
truths? It is
the poet's business, said Sidney, to make 'the
much-loved
earth more lovely'; it is the critic's business
—the most
truly useful part of it—to do the same for the
much-loved
world of letters. To point out the elusive
greatness, for
instance, of a writer like Racine is much
more valuable
than finding faults, or cramping the godhead
of Apollo
within the limits of some petty aesthetic
creed. That
simple utility, and the pleasure good criticism
can give in
itself, seem to me the real reasons for
writing it; it be-
comes a mixture of portrait-painting and
autobiography,
of table-talk and poetry. Different ages suffer
from dif-
ferent sorts of charlatanism; sometimes they
are religious,
sometimes they are political. It may be an
illusion to
suppose that our time is afflicted with more
than its share
of the literary kind; there may have been
just as much
critical cant fifty years ago, now simply
forgotten. But
I doubt it. In any case the educated world
today is, I
feel, too full of persons who have been or
are being,
in Blake's excellent phrase, 'connoisseured
out of their
senses'; too full of criticism which provokes
any mind in
the least critical to exclaim, as Hazlitt to

William Gifford:

'But you, sir, are a nuisance and should be
abated/ To
put about dyspeptic paradoxes with the air
of a public
authority is not merely useless; it serves, in
so far as it
succeeds, to lower the general level of
intelligence and
taste. We live, as it is, in a Europe
brutalised with dic-
tatorships of the Right and the Left; we need
no Hitlers
to adorn the republic of letters.